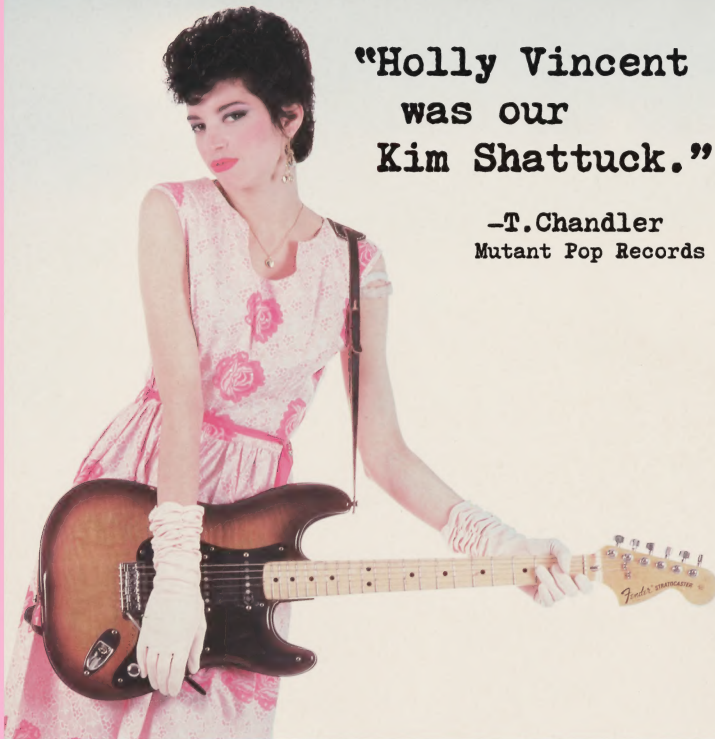


**"Holly Vincent
was our
Kim Shattuck."**

**-T.Chandler
Mutant Pop Records**



We live today in the Golden Age of Bootlegs. The power of internet search engines, the easy replicability of digital files, the declining cash value of physical product to the major record labels, the building of massive collections of live recordings over time by fans and underground capitalists, and the incomprehensibly vast quantity of music floating around the ether have created a perfect storm. If one seeks a live or rare recording, it can be found.

Usually.

Things are not so simple with the output created during the 45-year of Holly Beth Vincent, iconic vocalist and guitarist of the legendary 1981 new wave album, *The Right to Be Italian*. Arguably the greatest female-fronted power pop album produced in the 4.5 billion year history of planet Earth, *The Right to Be Italian* took a full year to record and release and sold very poorly on both sides of the Atlantic. The band broke up immediately, halfway through its two record deal with Richard Branson's Virgin Records (licensed to the incompetent Epic Records in the USA). A new band was cobbled together for a very different second album, the bizarrely titled Holly Beth Vincent: *Holly and the Italians*. Or was it Holly and the Italians: *Holly Beth Vincent*? No confusion here.

Whereas the balls-to-the-wall guitar rock of the first Holly album was critically acclaimed before stiffing and unceremonious cut-out by the label(s), this second release received little of that love before meeting the same fate. Violin? Trumpet? Marimba? What madness was this?!? Without Holly's work from the future available to provide context, this second album was interpreted as "pretentious" by mu-

sic critics and many fans. The shift from infectious 1960s girl group power pop to understated and artsy rock proved too much to handle.

Both of the albums almost instantly vanished from record stores of the world. Nor was either ever reissued in any country as a compact disc during the 20th Century. Some hipsters kept their eye on the ball a little, catching on that there was a 1993 indie album by Holly Vincent rebranded as *The Oblivious* as well as a forgettable 1995 art rock quickie created in six days with Johnette Napolitano of Concrete Blonde. For many, for most, this marked the end of the Holly and the Italians story — a flavor of the day in the UK from the tail end of the Britpunk explosion who turned in one amazing album before vanishing into the mist.

Reality is rather more complex.

The box set in your hands is an exercise in musical archaeology — one fan's attempt to unearth an underappreciated musical career and to breathe new life into little-known work by chopping it back and focusing again on the power pop beacon. To this end, rather than producing three unlistenable long and ultimately forgettable CD-Rs (a simple and inexpensive alternative), the choice has been made to repackage and regenerate this material as a set of “albums” which anachronistically adhere to the conventions of 21st Century pop-punk — short programs with a rocking, ballad-free sequence.

One big item is missing here — you must do homework. *The Right to Be Italian* remains in print and available as a reissue CD (albeit in its butchered Epic Records form). This has therefore been excluded from this package in accordance with the ancient Albanian folk adage: “Do not gore your neighbor's ox in the fall if you wish its health in the spring.” Do not worry, there is room inside this box to store your homemade disc. An American bootleg made in 2001 presents what I believe to be

the definitive eight song sequence. Please review that as you make a CD-R from your own legal CD. Everything else in this package is out of print — difficult or impossible for normal people to locate. About L40,000 (Albanian lek = US\$350) has been spent on rare compact discs and CD-Rs from sellers in the United States of America, Canada, Germany, and Luxembourg building the content for this set.

Beyond this, several digital-only albums were available via Bandcamp for just a year or two before being withdrawn; this material was not successfully located. This unheard material is believed to have been limited to the techno and acoustic sub-genres and is therefore unlikely to have been selected for this set. The need remains for a comprehensive official box set of Holly Vincent's work — a package with a formal history, photographs, and sonic rarities. It is hoped that this unauthorized sampling of a portion of her work provides inspiration.

• • • • •

Holly Beth Vincent was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1956. Her parents, Vincent Cernuto (stage name Bob Vincent) and the former June Thomason (stage name Jackie Van) had sung together as “Silly Symphonists” for the Al Trace orchestra, teaming up on vocals for one of 1948's biggest jukebox hits, “You Call Everybody Darlin.” It remains unclear whether the family name was legally changed from Cernuto to Vincent before or after their marriage and the birth of Holly and her two brothers, but such a change was unquestionably formalized. Her very Italian father remained “Bob Vincent” until the end of his life.

More or less a vaudeville act that performed their hit hundreds of times by the end of the year, the Al Trace orchestra brought the Vincents into contact with clubs and performers around the country. Bob would make a career in the music business, moving from performer to “talent agent,” handling live entertainment

bookings for nightclubs. The big break came in 1962 when Vincent was named entertainment director for the Harrah's casinos of Northern Nevada, allowed a \$1.5 million budget to book the biggest stars of the era for Harrah's Tahoe and Reno. Vincent would remain in this position through 1965. He relocated in 1966 to Los Angeles to work a similar position for the Tudor Inn, an ambitious start-up which sought to duplicate the financial success of Las Vegas live entertainment in Southern California. This dream was short-lived. When that establishment throttled back its efforts, Vincent went into business booking talent for clubs as head of his own agency, Musart.

It was in this musical milieu that Holly Vincent grew up. As with her brother Nick (who later played with Frank Black), Holly was trained as a drummer, not a guitarist. She attended William Howard Taft High School in Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, in the San Fernando Valley. In a 1995 interview Vincent told Ira Robins of New York *Newsday* that around 1972 she had run away from home to live with remnants of the Manson family in the Mojave desert. "I read a lot of Edgar Allen Poe, practiced my drum lessons, and ran around naked," she declared with a laugh, noting that she later returned home to go back to school before dropping out. The story is so wild as to strain credulity. A short feature in the *Los Angeles Times* indicates Holly was a 1973 Taft High graduate, supporting the idea that this tale may well have been an exercise in myth-making.

Be that as it may, "By my senior year I knew music was what I wanted to do," Holly told the *Times*. "As soon as I was 18, I moved to England." The young drummer was taken under the wing by Chris Wood of the band Traffic and his wife, sharing space in their flat while she tried to start a band and make a go of it. Her musical acquaintances of this period included Steve Winwood, Mitch Mitchell

(Jimi Hendrix Experience), Keith Richards (Rolling Stones), and John Cale (Velvet Underground), she says. Holly connected with a female bassist and the pair took out an ad in the classified ad section of *Melody Maker* in an effort to find a guitarist. This ad was memorably answered by one “really good guitar player,” a 25-year old Loughton College English lecturer named Mark Knopfler.

“He liked — you know *liked* — me,” Holly remembered, and the two became a couple. Eventually the clock ran out and by 1976 Holly had returned home to SoCal. She took a job for a couple months in a Los Angeles S&M parlor to pay the bills. “Some nights I hit, some nights I got hit — it wasn’t much different than being in a rocknroll band,” she joked to the *LA Times* in 1980. Still trying to make her career in the music industry, Holly played drums for a series of Los Angeles bands, including Myrick and the Mannequins and rockabillys The Brothel Creepers — a band fronted by the 15-year old son of a former press secretary to The Beatles.

In the meantime, Mark Knopfler, a talent on the rise, took an American holiday, hitchhiking his way across the USA to see the country and venture a proposition. He asked Holly to join him in England as drummer for his new band. She declined. Dire Straits would go on to sell 78.1 million albums, with the pair’s eventual breakup providing fodder for some of Knopfler’s most poignant lyrics. *D’oh!!!*

The New Wave of 1977 changed everything. Los Angeles was at the epicenter of the American punk scene and Holly was fully engaged. Holly joined a female punk band called Backstage Pass, using their mutual glorious incompetence as a cover to change instruments, with the skilled drummer moving to beginning guitarist. This was not Holly’s band, it was a band she was in, although she did share writing and vocal duties, such as they were. “The music was awful, but it was fun,” she remembers. Joining her in the righteous cacaphony were Marina Del Ray, who

went on to form Vivabeat, and Che Zuro, later of The Orchids.

Pounding a couple giant cans of Schlitz Malt Liquor at The Masque one night, drunken inspiration came to Holly, moved no doubt by the 100% Italian-American heritage of her father. She tagged a name, “HOLLY AND THE ITALIANS,” in spraypaint on the wall of the scrungy punk dive. Soon thereafter, life imitated art and Holly’s band was born. Steve Dalton, a fellow drummer from Taft High School, was enlisted in the cause and the first songs began to be written for the group — music inspired by the catchy melodies of 1960s girl-group pop, with tempo and a raw, guitar-forward edge. With her deep musical background, there were many potential paths to follow. It was The Ronettes and the various female-fronted bands of the Phil Spector “wall of sound” universe that rang true.

There was magic brewing. In April 1978, encouraged by her long-distance boyfriend Knopfler’s enthusiastic response to a demo, Holly and Dalton ventured across the Atlantic in an attempt to win a recording contract in the vibrant British scene, then in the midst of a full fledged musical revolution. It was not new ground, as Holly was joining other American expats such as Chrissie Hynde, Devo, and The Dickies in an end run around the constipated Ameri-



can major labels. A new bassist needed to be found and young Englishman Mark Sidgwick was added to the group. The three-piece band began to hone their sound.

The Knopfler connection proved helpful, with DJ Charlie Gillette, regarded as the “discoverer” of Dire Straits, placed in possession of a demo tape. He was wowed and a single on his own Oval Records followed, pairing the wonderfully snotty “Tell That Girl to Shut Up” on the A with a cover of the kitschy ’60s hit “Chapel of Love.” The record received enough radio airplay to become a minor hit in the UK new wave scene, and Holly and the Italians found themselves opening shows for The Clash — who were and are, you should be reminded, The Only Band That Matters™. The A&R men began sniff, sniff, sniffing and shortly Holly signed on the line for a two album deal with Richard Branson’s Virgin Records, home of The Sex Pistols/PiL, Devo, The Ruts, Penetration, and XTC.

Holly, Steve, and Mark were sent to New York City’s Record Plant Studios to make an album with 1960s producer George “Shadow” Morton, whose resumé included “Leader of the Pack” and other hits for The Shangri-Las. This sounded good on paper, no doubt. Very good. It proved a match made in Hell.

The first day went fine, Holly later told Ira Robbins of *Newsday*, but “when we showed up the next day, [Morton] had left a note at the reception desk that said, ‘Gone out for blood transfusion, be back at 4 o’clock.’ He never came back again.”

After some delay and scrambling, Richard Gottlehrer was enlisted to guide the engineer. Several session musicians were used for the recording, including David Letterman’s keyboard doodling sidekick Paul Schaffer, synth player Jerry Harrison of The Modern Lovers and Talking Heads, and other extras to play recorder, strings, and brass. Holly disliked the first mix and a new engineer was brought in for a full remix. Two singles were released to support the album. The end result

was slow and costly. During the torturous year making the album Holly's high school pal, drummer Steve Young, had left the band. Then bassist Mark Sidgwick returned to England to form his own band, Eastern Bloc. *The Right to Be Italian* finally appeared, and power pop fans may agree that the final result was worth the wait, but it came at a price. Moreover, the music business is no meritocracy; fan approval amounts to little when the method of counting is accounting. By major label standards, the album stiffed. Virgin Records and its incompetent American partner, Epic, had lost money. There were frowny faces in label land.

Holly was left at square one. The pressure and disappointment was immense. Wracked by insomnia, Holly was prescribed tranquilizers and sedatives by a doctor. She went down the rabbit hole, strung out on downers. "I started doing a lot of LSD, too, which didn't help," she told *Newsday* in 1995.

A new band was formed and new songs were written, leading to the aforementioned Holly and the Italians *Holly Beth Vincent* album. Or vice-versa. Whatever. A major assist was provided by Joey Ramone, who became Holly's beau for a time. The pair recorded a 7-inch of "I've Got You Babe," which got some play in the UK. Holly and the Italians also opened for the Ramones on tour, getting some much needed exposure in the US.

The second album was both a change of pace and an acquired taste, and many fans of the earlier sound did not make the trek. Rock critic Ira Robbins was a fan, calling it "as hauntingly atmospheric as the moments before a storm, and as enigmatic as Freud,... a profoundly affecting ode to glamorous dissipation and bisexual romance, a document more than an invention." This was the minority view. Other disappointed reviewers pounded the album with bulpeen hammers. It quickly vanished from world, cut out by the labels — a decision never revisited when the

compact disc revolutionized the music business in the 1990s, transforming back catalog into a profit river. [The highlights of this material have been lightly mastered and reconstituted as the first of the seven discs of this box set, *Cool Love*.]

Adding insult to injury, Holly was both dropped by Virgin and deported from the UK. “I think it had something to do with an interview I gave to *Melody Maker* in which I had mentioned that I had worked as a dominatrix for a couple months in California,” she speculated.

It is here that Holly Vincent essentially vanished from the pop culture radar — iconic status intact among the True Believers, but now effectively an underground figure. She did a momentary stint in The Waitresses (“I Know What Boys Like”), fronting a couple shows in May and June 1983 before deciding the ongoing legal drama over the band name between other members and former and future lead singer Patty Donohue was not her scene. She made a second restart of Holly and the Italians in 1984, playing shows around New York with Jimmy Rip, who had played with Tom Verlaine and Kid Creole, and legendary bassist Busta Jones. To pay the bills she briefly worked in a topless bar on Wall Street, she told an interviewer. Fortunately, she eventually found her way home, a true survivor — kicking drugs, meeting a guy, having a kid, and returning to Los Angeles.

She was rejoined by high school chum Steve Young for a new incarnation of the Holly Vincent experience in 1987, laying down several demo tracks in New York City. Then she reshuffled the deck again in 1988 for another set of demos in pursuit of a new recording contract. Notably the 1988 lineup included Jane Scarpantoni on cello, marking a return to Holly’s signature use of classical strings as rock instrument. [Highlights are included as the second disc of this set, *Here Comes Another Day*, featuring one track from the 1987 and six from 1988. A live set from

this period is included as the seventh disc, *Live from New York City.*]

As the 1980s came to a close, punk rock was brewing in America, a tidal wave at least three times bigger than the 1977–82 first wave. Yet timing is everything and with her very mainstream music industry upbringing, Holly's focus on large and clueless labels seems in retrospect to have been misplaced. A set of acoustic home demos were made in 1992 and four songs for films recorded with Jimmy Rip. But-time was of the essence. The music world was blowing up.

There was no missing it. Holly formed another new band to answer the call, being joined once again by drummer Steve Dalton, but made a grave misstep by confusingly rebranding the assemblage as "The Oblivious featuring Holly Beth Vincent." An outstanding 14 track album was put to tape by this new band, released on CD by Daemon Records, the Decatur, Georgia, label of Amy Ray of Indigo Girls, a big Holly fan. A music video was made for one of the album's big hits, "Crush," which may be seen on YouTube. [The bulk of this terrific material have been split between the third and fourth discs of this set, *Crush* and *Sound of My Soul.*]

Perhaps the most exciting moment for pop-punk fans took place in 1998 when Holly was joined by bassist Mark Sturgeon and drummer Dawn Richardson. A gritty three-song demo was released, including authentic punk hits "Weekend" and "Iguana." Unfortunately, this permutation of the Holly Vincent experience never produced an album's worth of material and the effort came to naught. ["Weekend" appears here on the disc *Crush*; "Iguana" is put into play on the fifth disc of this set, *Carousel.*]

As the second wave of American punk receded, Holly moved on to new flavors, beginning to play with drum machine programming and techno sounds. Working with her brother Nick as engineer in 2006 and 2007 she put down 15 tracks in

Los Angeles and Nashville, ultimately released as a primitive CD-R, *Super Rocket Star*. This release is vanishingly rare today, listed at hefty prices when available on the market. [Three of the more guitar-forward songs from this release have been judged germane to this project and are included on *Carousel*.]

A series of virtually undocumented digital albums followed: *Minnesota Demos* (recorded in St. Paul, Minnesota with Travis Ramin) [n.d., 2009?]; *The Hippest Girl (Songs from Benedict Canyon)* (recorded in California with Jimmy Rip and cellist Matt Cooker) [n.d., 2009?] — renamed *Songs from Benedict Canyon* in 2017; *LAP-TOPpOP TECHNOhum* [2013]; *Paperdoll Technologies* [2016?]; *Crush* (date and content unknown since the Internet Archive crawler never preserved the index page); *Acoustic Bedroom Tapes* [Feb. 2017]; and *Saturday Tekk* [May 2017]. This material was available only for a short time on Bandcamp and not a trace remains today. Fortunately, it appears that the *Minnesota Demos* and *Songs from Benedict Canyon* material was aggregated to a manufactured-on-demand CD-R sold briefly through Amazon music called *Minnesota-California*. A copy of this rare disc was been obtained for this project and harvested. [All of the seventh disc of this set, *Rita Hayworth*, and four tracks of *Carousel* hail from this.]

As of 2019, Holly was still playing shows in California. A bad audience recording of one live set is circulating in the bootlegosphere. A fresh cover song is out on a 2022 Sympathy for the Record Industry compilation album.

Fans around the world await The Queen's triumphant return.

— **Merkush Murat**

Tirana, Albania (May 2022)

DISCOGRAPHY

Holly and the Italians

1. "Tell That Girl to Shut Up" b/w "Chapel of Love" 7" Oval Records (UK) Nov. 1979
 - a. Green PS, large center hole
 - b. Green PS, small center hole
 - c. Pink PS, small center hole
2. "Miles Away" b/w "It's Only Me" 7" Virgin Records, 1980
 - a. UK w/special sticker PS
 - b. France w/PS
 - c. Australia NO PS
 - d. Australia White Label Promo, NO PS
 - e. USA [on Epic Records] NO PS
 - f. USA White Label Promo, NO PS
3. *The Right to Be Italian* album Virgin Records, Feb. 1981
 - a. UK LP
 - b. Germany LP
 - c. France LP
 - d. Italy LP
 - e. Europe LP
 - f. Benelux LP
 - g. Yugoslavia LP
 - h. Australia LP
 - i. New Zealand LP
 - j. Japan LP
 - k. Canada LP
 - l. USA LP [Epic; broken sequence; bonus tracks]
 - m. UK Cassette [no country listed]
 - n. USA Cassette [broken sequence]
 - o. USA CD reissue [Wounded Bird Records, 2002; broken sequence]
 - p. Japan CD reissue [2010]
4. "I Wanna Go Home" b/w "Fanzine" 7" Virgin Records, 1981
 - a. UK w/PS
 - b. Italy



5. "Youth Coup" b/w "Poster Boy" 7" Virgin Records, 1981
 - a. UK w/PS
 - b. Netherlands w/Alternate PS
 - c. Australia w/PS
 - d. Australia White Label Promo w/PS
6. "Just For Tonight" b/w "Baby Gets It All" 7" Virgin Records, 1981
 - a. UK w/ PS
7. "Poster Boy" + "Medley" flexidisc, Trouser Press, 1981
 - a. UK red plastic, NO PS

Holly Beth Vincent solo

11. *Holly and the Italians* album Virgin Records, 1982
 - a. UK LP
 - b. France LP
 - c. Italy LP
 - d. Europe LP
 - e. New Zealand LP
 - f. USA LP [Epic; broken sequence]
 - g. USA CD reissue [Wounded Bird, 2010; broken sequence, bonus tracks]
10. HOLLY & JOEY: "I've Got You Babe" b/w "One More Dance" 7" Virgin Records, 1982
 - a. UK w/PS
 - b. France w/PS
 - c. Canada NO PS
 - d. USA w/PS [Ramo Records, 2010 reissue]
11. "For What It's Worth" b/w "Dangerously" 7" Virgin Records, 1982
 - a. UK w/PS
- 11A. "For What It's Worth (extended version)" b/w "Dangerously" 12" Virgin, 1982
 - a. UK w/PS
 - b. USA NO PS [Epic Records]
 - c. USA Promo NO PS [Epic; colored label marked as promo]
12. "Honolulu" b/w "Revenge" 7" Virgin Records, 1982
 - a. UK w/PS



The Oblivious

13. *America* album Daemon Records, 1993
- a. USA CD
 - b. USA Promotional Cassette [title sleeve]

Holly Vincent and Johnette Napolitano

14. *Vowel Movement* album Mammoth Records, 1995
- a. USA CD
 - b. USA Promo CD [cover marked as promo]
 - c. Canada CD [Attic Records]
 - d. Australia CD [Liberation Records]
 - e. USA Cassette
 - f. Canada Cassette [Attic Records]

Holly and the Italians [*Actually mostly solo period material*]

15. *Demos Federico* album Wounded Bird Records, 2003
- a. USA double CD

Holly Beth Vincent solo

16. *Super Rocket Star* album Self-Released, 2007
- a. USA CD-R [color cover]
 - b. USA CD-R [black and white cover, handwritten burner disc]
17. *Minnesota-California* album Self-Released [via Amazon Music], 2009
- a. USA CD [actually a CD-R]
18. "Hey Boy" b/w "Smash" 7" Ramo Records, 2012
- a. USA w/PS

Backstage Pass

19. *77* album Semi-Pro Records, 2019
- a. USA cassette (ltd. 125 copies)

Chronology, content, and dates of digital releases are unclear, please see page 12 above for a list of titles.



I

Cool Love

[1982 album tracks and an alt. version]

II

Here Comes Another Day

[1988 demos + a 1987 track]

III

Crush

[1993 album tracks + a 1998 track]

IV

Sound of My Soul

[1993 album tracks]

V

Carousel

[a 1998 track + 3 from 2007 + 4 from 2009]

VI

Rita Hayward

[2009 album tracks]

VII

Live NYC 1988

[audience tape]